EXPLORATION, LANGUAGE AND APPLICATION
AN APPROACH TO TEACHING BEGINNING INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ IMPROVISATION

Jeremy Todd Pownall

The undersigned, appointed by the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University, have examined the Graduate Music Project titled

EXPLORATION, LANGUAGE, AND APPLICATION: AN APPROACH TO TEACHING BEGINNING INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ IMPROVISATION

presented by Jeremy Todd Pownall,
a candidate for the degree of Master of Music Education
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

(Project Advisor)

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Columbus State University

EXPLORATION, LANGUAGE, AND APPLICATION: AN APPROACH TO TEACHING BEGINNING INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ IMPROVISATION

By

Jeremy Todd Pownall

A MASTERS THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty
of Columbus State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Music in Music Education

Columbus, Georgia
2011

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide preservice and inservice teachers with an alternative approach to teaching beginning jazz improvisation to instrumentalists in a classroom setting. It was determined that there exists a need for an accessible (to both teacher and student) method for teaching beginning jazz improvisation to instrumentalists. This is due to the lack of emphasis on jazz improvisation at both the public school and university level, as well as the inclusion of improvisation in both the national and Georgia state standards for music performance. The teaching method presented in this study is based on previous research, existing teaching methods and strategies, and the educational experience of the author. A number of valuable resources are used in the teaching process, but are presented strategically to avoid overwhelming the reader. This method suggests teaching improvisation using three separate components: Exploration, Language, and Application. Exploration involves the development of student aural skills through singing and playing improvised melodies, singing and playing back melodies created by other students, and playing improvised solos with an accompaniment (live or play-a-long) using previously learned knowledge and skills. In the Language component, students will listen to recordings of artist-level jazz musicians, transcribe solos, and develop knowledge of jazz theory by learning the chords, scales and modes used in various harmonic progressions. Application involves applying the developed improvisation skills to jazz repertoire, whether it is a jazz standard in a combo setting or a full big band chart; students learn to improvise in an actual performance setting, in the context of real music. These three components are used to reduce anxiety and teach improvisation in a comfortable and accessible setting, segmenting the process to allow time for students to process and absorb the given information and develop the skills needed to improvise.

To my wife, Afton, and daughter, Marion

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project is due to the support of a number of people. I would first like to thank Dr. Sean Powell, Dr. Amy Griffiths, and Dr. Lisa Oberlander, not only for their effort and support in advising this particular project, but for their continued guidance and pedagogical contributions to my music education.

In addition to Dr. Amy Griffiths, I would like to thank Dr. Shirantha Beddage and Dr. Alex Pershounin for their influence in my study of jazz. It is because of these people that I have developed the deep appreciation and love for jazz that I have today.

If it were not for the experiences and music education that Erin Cole and Dr. Sonny Petway provided in middle and high school, I would not have pursued a career in music and obtained the knowledge and skills that I gained at this point in my life.

I would like to thank my parents, Todd Pownall, Julie Pownall, Tammy Williams and Dan Williams for their unconditional support of my musical endeavors, from sixth grade band to graduate studies. Without them, I would not have had the opportunity to pursue a career in music and further my studies at the collegiate level.

My wife, Afton Pownall, has provided encouragement and companionship throughout this process, and for that I thank her. Her support alone has allowed me to accomplish a number of educational goals, including this project.

Finally, I would like to thank my heavenly father for the many wonderful opportunities and blessings I have been given in my life. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Above all, it is for the glory of God that I do everything, and I owe it all to Him.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Improvisation, a spontaneous musical composition using existing knowledge and skills, contributes to a higher level of overall musicianship for students (Azzara, 1993, Azzara, 1999, Guilbault, 2009, Riviere, 2006). Recognizing this value, educators have identified improvisation as a "Performance Standard for Music" at the Georgia state level, as well as the national level in the United States (Cox, 2009, National Association for Music Education, 2011).

The jazz medium provides an effective outlet for teaching improvisation. In addition to addressing the identified "Performance Standard for Music" regarding improvisation, the study of jazz improvisation promotes the development of other standards as well (See Appendices K & L). For example, the study of jazz improvisation – as presented in this study - not only addresses [3]Improvising melodies, variation, and accompaniments, but includes the following national "Performance Standards for Music": [1]Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music, [2]Performing on insturments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music, [4]Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines, [5]Reading and notating music, and [6]Listening to, analyzing, and describing music (National Association for Music Education, 2011). These facts indicate the inherent value in teaching improvisation and the effectiveness of using the jazz medium to do so.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the numerous benefits to teaching jazz improvisation – some specifically addressed above – the study of jazz improvisation is absent from the curriculuum requirements for most undergraduate and graduate degree programs in music education. Consequently, the study of jazz

improvisation is absent from the curriculum of many public school music programs (Azzara, 1999), regardless of its inclusion as a "Performance Standard for Music" at the Georgia state and national level in the United States (Cox, 2009, National Association for Music Education, 2011). This divide between the stated value of improvisation by educators and the lack of collegiate instruction in jazz improvisation to preservice teachers results in the absence of jazz improvisation in the classroom.

Purpose

The purpose of this research-based instructional method is to provide preservice and inservice teachers with an accessible method for teaching beginning jazz improvisation to instrumentalists of all ages. It is designed to provide teachers who lack experience in this area with an accessible teaching method that aims to minimize performance anxiety associated with jazz improvisation and assist in the development of teacher efficacy. Research suggests that, due to lack of experience, not all teachers have confidence in teaching improvisation (Volz, 2005). For example, "a preservice teacher with a substantial amount of experience working with wind ensembles may feel relatively confident about his or her ability to direct such a group successfully but may not feel confident when faced with a middle school jazz ensemble" (Watson, 2010, p. 242). This study is not designed to be a sure-fire method for creating expert jazz artists or improvisers; it is intended to provide teachers and students with a comfortable setting for learning to improvise in a stress-free and accessible way. This goal is supported by Norgaard (2011), who stated that "the responsibility of continuing the tradition of jazz improvisation has shifted to the educator, which raises the question of how best to design authentic learning experiences" (p. 110).

Research Questions

1. How can teachers and students use "exploration" to enhance the study of jazz improvisation?
2. How is jazz improvisation like a language and how can that language be taught to beginning improvisers?
3. In what ways can learned improvisation skills be applied to repertoire and performance?
4. What do students gain (musically) from learning to improvise?

Scope and Limitations

This study consists of a compilation of resources and instructional strategies combined to form a simple, accessible method for teaching beginning jazz improvisation to instrumentalists of all ages. Intended for use as a teaching method, it is not based on active data collection or experimentation.

Definition of Terms

Improvisation

According to Merriam-Webster, to improvise means: [1]to compose, recite, play, or sing extemporaneously; [2]to make, invent, or arrange offhand; [3]to make or fabricate out of what is conveniently on hand ("improvise"). The act of musical improvisation combines these definitions; the artist creates a spontaneous musical composition using existing knowledge and skills. Jazz improvisation involves applying this technique to a variety of styles and performance settings.

Transcription

The process of mimicking recorded material – by playing and singing – through listening,

using some form of recorded media (e.g. learning how to play a solo recorded by a jazz artist by listening to the record and playing what is heard).

Head

The melody of the tune.

Chorus

One time through the form of the tune (e.g., in a twelve bar blues, one chorus is twelve bars long); a complete iteration of the harmonic progression.

Organization of Study

Chapter 2 will be a review of literature pertaining to improvisation, including discussion of materials that address anxiety as associated with jazz improvisation as well as established teaching methods and previously conducted studies. Chapter 3 will contain the methodology, which will discuss the thought process used in approach to the method presented, as well as the organization of the method. Chapter 4 will outline the teaching method. This method has been created based on previous research, published teaching methods and techniques, and the author's personal educational experience. It will answer research questions 1-4 involving exploration, language, application, and the effects of improvisation on overall musicianship, as well as provide a sample lesson that summarizes the method in an applicable manner.

Summary

The lack of required experience with jazz improvisation in undergraduate and graduate music education degree programs results in the lack of jazz improvisation instruction in music programs in the public school system. There is a definite need for an easily accessible teaching method for teachers who may be inexperienced in the area of jazz improvisation. This study is a compilation of resources, presented in a way that is useful for teaching beginning jazz

improvisation to instrumentalists of any level (elementary to post-high school graduates).

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The review of literature will be divided into four sections: Effects of Improvisation on Overall Musicianship, The Mental Approach – which includes Performance Anxiety and Mental Strategies for Improvisation Performance, Jazz Language, and Instructional Strategies/Methods. Effects of Improvisation on Overall Musicianship will discuss reasons for studying the art of improvisation and why it is important for a well-balanced education. The Mental Approach will discuss previous articles, studies, and resources dealing with two separate mental approaches to improvisation: Performance Anxiety and Mental Strategies for Improvisation Performance. Performance Anxiety will discuss how performance anxiety is related to the study of improvisation. For example, it is not uncommon that teachers and students become nervous at the thought of having to perform without the comfort of sheet music in front of them. In addition, it is important to discuss the thought process that leads to a successful improvised solo. This will be discussed in Mental Strategies for Improvisation Performance. Knowing what expert improvisers are thinking as they create music spontaneously is useful in learning to improvise, even as a beginner. Jazz Language will provide a parallel between learning how to improvise jazz and learning to speak, suggesting that jazz is a language and should be approached that way. Instructional Strategies and Methods will discuss studies and resources available for use in teaching jazz improvisation. There are numerous approaches to teaching improvisation, and it is helpful to know about various teaching strategies when attempting to teach or learn the art of improvisation, especially when the vast majority of resources tend to overload teachers with too much information at once.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The review of literature will be divided into four sections: Effects of Improvisation on Overall Musicianship, The Mental Approach – which includes Performance Anxiety and Mental Strategies for Improvisation Performance, Jazz Language, and Instructional Strategies/Methods. Effects of Improvisation on Overall Musicianship will discuss reasons for studying the art of improvisation and why it is important for a well-balanced education. The Mental Approach will discuss previous articles, studies, and resources dealing with two separate mental approaches to improvisation: Performance Anxiety and Mental Strategies for Improvisation Performance. Performance Anxiety will discuss how performance anxiety is related to the study of improvisation. For example, it is not uncommon that teachers and students become nervous at the thought of having to perform without the comfort of sheet music in front of them. In addition, it is important to discuss the thought process that leads to a successful improvised solo. This will be discussed in Mental Strategies for Improvisation Performance. Knowing what expert improvisers are thinking as they create music spontaneously is useful in learning to improvise, even as a beginner. Jazz Language will provide a parallel between learning how to improvise jazz and learning to speak, suggesting that jazz is a language and should be approached that way. Instructional Strategies and Methods will discuss studies and resources available for use in teaching jazz improvisation. There are numerous approaches to teaching improvisation, and it is helpful to know about various teaching strategies when attempting to teach or learn the art of improvisation, especially when the vast majority of resources tend to overload teachers with too much information at once.

Effects of Improvisation on Overall Musicianship

As discussed in Chapter 1, there exists a lack of emphasis on improvisation in music education, from elementary school to graduate studies. Because of this, there is a need to express the importance of improvisation and the benefits that come from it. Perhaps one reason for the lack of improvisation in classrooms is the origin and development of jazz. While jazz is not the only outlet for improvisation, it is a great place to start, as jazz is set apart from other genres because of its connection to improvisation (Norgaard, 2011). Leonard Bernstein stated that "a popular song doesn't become jazz until it is improvised on, and there you have the real core of all jazz: improvisation" (1959, p. 112).

Studies indicate that learning to improvise contributes to better musicianship and higher levels of thinking in general (Azzara, 1993, Azzara, 1999, Guilbault, 2009, Riviere, 2006), such as the increased ability to read and perform music from written notation. Azzara (1993) suggests that "improvisation ability appears to transfer to a student's clearer comprehension of the tonal, rhythmic, and expressive elements of music in an instrumental performance from notation" (p. 339). Not only does the study of improvisation contribute to a well-rounded music education (including jazz along with the study of other styles or genres), but it contributes to a greater level of overall musicianship for participants. David Baker supports this notion by saying that "improvisation can, if properly handled, serve as a valuable adjunct to the other education concepts we use in teaching music. It can be the means to an end as well as an end in itself" (1980b).

The Mental Approach

While the physical aspects of playing do play a large and vital role in the activity of jazz improvisation, the mental approach is crucial to a successful improvisation experience. This

section will discuss two separate mental aspects of jazz improvisation: performance anxiety and mental strategies for improvisation performance. According to Lehmann, Sloboda, and Woody (2007), "the pedagogy of jazz emphasizes expressing oneself through the music as the highest priority (p. 156)." Minimizing performance anxiety and focusing on specific mental strategies will allow the performer to express him or herself freely.

Performance anxiety. "As music teachers, we may inadvertently place our students who are learning to improvise on the equivalent of the Daytona 500" (Volz, 2005, p. 50). This statement implies several issues that lie within the instruction of improvisation, but at the heart of it is the issue of anxiety. Due to the complex, multi-tasking nature of improvisation, the method and pacing of instruction require significant thought in order to avoid overloading students with too much information at once time.

Erin Wehr-Flowers (2006) studied attitude, anxiety and confidence of students learning jazz improvisation and compared the differences between males and females. The general goal of Wehr-Flowers' study was to demonstrate the dominance of male participation in the jazz idiom. The results confirmed that females generally have lower confidence, more anxiety and possibly a negative attitude toward improvisation. However, the findings of Wehr-Flowers' study also revealed that these conditions exist in male as well as female students. Wehr-Flowers provides the following suggestion for jazz improvisation instruction:

> Modeling jazz style and musical language in small, repeatable phrases can build confidence and jazz vocabulary. Providing instruction in how to practice jazz as well as providing recorded background materials will allow students to practice alone without the added pressures of peer evaluation (2006, p. 346-347).

Based on this study, Wehr-Flowers concludes that research does not suggest a difference in male

and female skill level in jazz improvisation. This implies that anxiety and lack of confidence may create a learning barrier, but do not determine the potential for student success. (Wehr-Flowers, 2006).

Research shows that it is not simply the task at hand that is intimidating, but often the way it is presented to students. Riviere supports this by saying "you can most effectively reduce anxiety by creating an encouraging environment" (Riviere, 2006, p. 43). The results of this study will share ideas of how to create an encouraging environment through specific teaching strategies

Mental strategies for improvisation performance. Once anxiety has been minimized by creating a comfortable learning environment, the mental approach to improvisation can begin. Norgaard (2011) conducted a study observing the thought processes of artist-level jazz musicians. In the study, seven jazz artists recorded an improvised solo, then immediately after reviewed their thought process with a researcher while listening to the recording and looking at computer-transcribed notation of their improvisations. The researcher found commonalities between all seven artists that manifest themselves in four main strategies used during real-time improvisation: recalling well-learned ideas, harmonic priority, melodic priority, and repeating material. The artists also mentioned "sketch planning" for their improvisations and evaluating or monitoring personal progress as they played (Norgaard, 2011).

Jazz Language

The language of jazz as used in jazz improvisation can be directly compared to spoken language. Just as a speaker uses a vocabulary of words, as well as a thought process used in the organization of those words to express an idea verbally, an improviser uses a vocabulary of notes, rhythms, and patterns to express musical ideas. Berkowitz (2010), Berliner (1994), and

Pressing (1998, as cited in Norgaard, 2011) concluded that "the thought process guiding tonal jazz improvisation has been compared to the thinking process that supports spoken language, because both are created in real time" (p. 110). Velleman (1978) creates a parallel between speech and improvisation by using the principles of linguistic methodology compared to the teaching of jazz improvisation. He explains, through audio-lingual methodology, that people can only write what they can say, so "a parallel approach to improvising would necessarily focus on the student's internalization of sound patterns prior to their being studied in written form" (Velleman, 1978, p. 28).

Hinz further supports the parallel between jazz improvisation and the spoken word, summarizing that "jazz, in the broadest sense, is the improvised variation of a melody based on a previously established harmonic and rhythmic framework" (Hinz, 1995, p. 30). Within the jazz language, there is a specific vocabulary that artists use to express their musical thoughts and ideas. Based on recordings, this language also varies a bit from artist to artist, and it is through transcription that an artists' language can be discovered and analyzed for the benefit of the performer and listener.

Instructional Strategies and Methods

When approaching jazz improvisation instruction, some researchers suggest that notation-based instruction is the most efficient method of instruction. Others believe firmly that improvisation is an entirely aural experience (Azzara, 1999, Volz, 2005). Watson (2010) studied the effects of aural and notated instruction on both achievement and self efficacy, with results showing that aural instruction contributed to significantly greater gains. Nevertheless, it is evident that there are many ways to teach improvisation, and different methods have proven successful with different groups of people.

Volz (2005) suggests a number of activities to use when "exploring" improvisation, such as assuming a character, which involves the implementation of theater and drama into the classroom. According to Volz, listening for structure, intent to match mental performance, and tonal center, are ways to assess student development (2005). These are specific strategies for use in improvisation instruction, not a method of instruction on their own.

Kuzmich, Jr. (1980) discusses the pros and cons of available print methods for teaching jazz improvisation. He concludes that "jazz improvisation materials for instrumentalists generally divide into two types: methods that attempt to conceptualize the theory and techniques of improvisation on an in-depth basis, and supplemental materials that specialize in a limited area of improvisation instruction" (p. 52). Among the available methods and supplemental materials, Kuzmich, Jr. suggests that only ten percent of them are "designed for the heterogeneous classroom" (p. 52), which is the target audience for this document – teachers who teach instrumentalists in the classroom. This implies a need for new, or at least revised methodology approaching jazz improvisation in the classroom.

Incorporating improvisation into the regular music rehearsal or class is a practice used by Riviere (2006), who suggests the importance of improvisation based on its inclusion in the National Standards for Music Education. The author outlines a few very specific ideas for using "improvisation games" in the classroom, including: "Solos and Conversations with Strings," "A Registers Game for Intermediate Band," and "Cadenzas and Dissonances with an Advanced Choir" (p. 1-3). She also discusses the importance of lesson planning and intentionally incorporating organized improvisation activities into the everyday music lesson (Riviere, 2006).

Guilbault (2009) studied the effects of harmonic accompaniment on tonal improvisation. Public school students in Michigan, grades one through six, were taught using a variety of

improvisation activities, including exploration, singing new endings to tunes, activities with tonic and dominant function, "conversational improvisation," and improvisation over a given harmonic progression. The author found that students who received a root melody accompaniment along with their improvisation received significantly higher ratings. This implies that students, even at a young age, do benefit from harmonic accompaniment and can learn to hear and understand harmonic function in the context of improvisation.

Hinz (1995) supports the notion that jazz is a primarily aural experience. "Unlike the tradition of Classical music, in which the music is transmitted mainly in written form, jazz is transmitted mainly through an aural tradition by recordings and a direct experience of the music. Accordingly, listening and imitating (as opposed to reading music) are the principal means by which the music is grasped" (Hinz, 2005, p. 31). He also suggests teaching scales and modes to correspond with specific chords in a progression, which is essentially common practice for jazz musicians and is supported by established jazz educators such as Jamey Aebersold, (Aebersold, 1976), David Baker (Baker, 1980a, 1980b), and Jerry Coker (Coker, 1964, 1975).

Jamey Aebersold has published a numerous amount of material for use in teaching jazz improvisation. *Major and Minor in Every Key: Learn to Improvise Jazz, Nothin' but Blues: Jazz and Rock,* and *Blues in All Keys* are just a few of the available volumes from Jamey Aebersold Jazz (Aebersold, 1976, 2009, 1981, 1988). These volumes provide the learner with exercises to learn harmony, suggested scales and modes to use over specific chords, as well as perhaps the most valuable resource, a play-a-long CD to use as a harmonic accompaniment for improvisation. Jamey Aebersold's method combines both aural and notated instruction to teach the learner specific exercises and motives to play while simultaneously reinforcing the importance of listening and internalizing harmonic movement.

Although he is most known for his contribution to jazz education, David N. Baker is a proponent of improvisation education, including styles other than jazz (Baker, 1980b). In an article he wrote for the Music Educators Journal, Baker presents one strategy for learning to improvise that involves changing the mode of a given melody. He takes the melody, "Joy to the World," and presents it in a variety of modes, including major, different forms of minor, whole tone, diminished, lydian dominant, and the blues, which in this case is based on the blues scale. This approach immediately puts the music into context, as the performer is working with a melody rather than scales or exercises.

Baker (1980a) has also published a number of books in his "Giants of Jazz" series. These books cover a number of jazz artists, including Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Sonny Rollins, Fats Navarro, and Clifford Brown. This resource provides the reader with biographical information on the artist, a selection of transcriptions, guidance on chord to scale releationships, as well as melodic patterns frequently used by the given performer. The books can be a great resource for beginning improvers and are especially beneficial for analyzing and dissecting the transcriptions of landmark jazz artists.

Coker (1964, 1975) provides a method not only for teaching improvisation, but the jazz style and genre in general. In his book entitled, *Improvising Jazz*, he divides the task into segments, such as "the rhythm section" or "analysis and development of melody," and discusses each aspect of improvisation individually. His teaching of functional harmony is especially beneficial, as he not only discusses chord to scale relationships, but explains the actual function of those chords. The following quote explains his feeling on the importance of learning harmonic function:

It would be possible, having learned the chord symbols and chord structures found in jazz,

> to dispense with any further consideration of jazz harmony. However, this would analogous to learning the alphabet and vocabulary of a foreign language and, without knowledge of the syntax or structure, attempting to speak the language. It would be helpful to learn the functions of the four families of chords (actually there are only three, since the tonic majors and the tonic minors function in the same way, establishing the tonic in the major and minor modes), as well as to gain an understanding of the functional sequence of chords (Coker, 1964, p. 71).

His methodology does not stray far from that of Jamey Aebersold or David Baker; it is simply presented in a different way.

Summary

Educators have an almost overwhelming amount of things to think about when approaching jazz education and teaching jazz improvisation to their students. Previous research and study contains implications involving the effects of improvisation on overall musicianship, performance anxiety, mental thought processes during the act of improvisation, and the idea that jazz improvisation is a language. There are also numerous methodologies and strategies used in approaching jazz improvisation instruction. Based on both research and personal experience, I believe that while there is a great deal of research and knowledge available, the need still exists for a simple and accessible way of teaching beginning instrumental jazz improvisation. Many available resources seem to cater to musicians who have an already established relationship with jazz improvisation, rather than present an easy way to begin that relationship. This study aims to present existing knowledge and strategies for teaching improvisation in a new, accessible way, designed for beginning improvisers.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The method for teaching improvisation presented in this study is based on previous research, published teaching materials and the educational experience of the author. Following a review of existing studies and teaching methods, it has been determined that the need exists for an accessible teaching method for *beginning* improvisers. This method is based on existing teaching strategies, such those used by known jazz educators such as Jamey Aebersold, David Baker, and Christopher Azzara; it is simply presented in an alternative manner.

Methodology

The absence of jazz improvisation in music classrooms (Azzara, 1999) indicates a need for a clear and basic way of teaching it. Research suggests that educators often lack teacher efficacy when approaching jazz improvisation, or simply lack the proper training when it comes to the subject (Azzara, 1999, Volz, 2005, Riviere, 2006, Watson, 2010). This becomes a problem because improvisation is "Performance Standard for Music" in the state of Georgia and at the national level in the United States (Cox, 2009, National Association for Music Education, 2011). Due to the lack of knowledge and training in jazz improvisation, this method is designed to minimize anxiety – for both teacher and student - and present improvisation in a manageable and accessible manner.

The information and strategies used in this method are not newly discovered principles; they are simply pre-existing methods presented in an alternative way. The basis for this presentation stems from the way people learn as documented in educational psychology literature. Through cognitive and psychology theories on learning, the following conclusion has

been made in regard to student learning:

> Student learning can be defined as the outcome from the retrieval (free recall) of desired information. Student learning occurs in two processes. The first process is the transfer of information from short-term memory of sensory preceptors into long-term memory. The second process is the retrieval through free recall of that information. (Cluskey, Elbeck, Hill & Strupeck, 2011, p. 1)

Because student learning involves a process of storing and recalling information, teaching (in general) must be intentional and strategic in order to generate success. The study of jazz improvisation is no different, and I would venture to say that it requires an even more demanding process of storing and recalling information, as this occurs within the confines of musical time.

Jazz improvisation requires a level of multi-tasking that is not often demanded in other activities, even in reading music notation. In order for students to successfully realize harmony and spontaneously create melodic ideas on top of it in real time, the learning process must be one that allows them to develop the skills necessary to do so. It is for this reason that my method for teaching improvisation is broken down into three components: Exploration, Language, and Application.

The thought process behind this separation of tasks is to provide the required time and repetition necessary to develop improvisation skills. In addition, if the learner is asked to do several different steps in order to complete the task, they may become overwhelmed if the steps are not presented in a logical and accessible manner. This method was designed to break the task of learning to improvise jazz into accessible and specific components, while at the same time providing flexibility for teachers in classrooms of varying size and skill level.

It is through the thought process described above that this method was developed. Again, it

is not designed to present a novel development in jazz education. Rather, the aim is to provide music educators with an alternative approach to teaching improvisation and the tools necessary to begin their journey of learning and teaching jazz improvisation. For example, each component has specific rules (e.g., students do not learn new information in the Exploration component; previous knowledge and skills are used to practice improvisation) that allow the learner to focus their attention on one specific task at a time. The Exploration component involves singing and playing improvised ideas and strengthening aural skill, but does not involve learning new material – harmonic progressions, specific patterns, etc. This isolation allows the student to focus on the creative aspect of improvisation, and at the same time makes it clear that specific knowledge and skills are required in order to improvise. The knowledge and skills used to improvise are learned in a separate component, called Language. Finally, Application involves applying all of the learned material to a performance-based, genuine musical context.

The separation of tasks mentioned above not only allows students to focus on one aspect of jazz improvisation at a time, but it reduces anxiety by masking the macro task. By the end of the learning sequence, they will not have to consciously think about each specific process that they are going through, which inhibits them from realizing how challenging the task actually is. This allows them to use their knowledge and skills to make music, rather than waste energy on having anxiety toward the task at hand.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

Learning to improvise can be an enjoyable and beneficial experience, for both teacher and student alike, if approached properly. Improvisation is an aural experience, in addition to being physically and mentally demanding on the performer. It takes an already challenging phenomenon (e.g. playing an instrument) and adds additional layers of demand to the activity.

The multi-tasking element of improvisation requires that careful training take place in order to ensure success. As previously mentioned, Norgaard (2011) found that artist-level jazz musicians use four different strategies and two ongoing thought processes when improvising. Musicians are asked to think about embouchure, hand position, posture, breathing, musical form, harmonic structure, time feel, ensemble skills, et cetera, all while attempting to spontaneously create a melody that fits in with everything else that is going on. While it is virtually impossible to truly multi-task at this level, carefully pacing of instruction and learning to master each individual element will lead to success. Some elements must become part of the subconscious in order for the performer to focus on the task at hand. Hinz supports this, stating that "helping students play jazz isn't easy, but if you teach them to explore scales and chords, particular rhythms, and great recordings, you'll be helping to develop their creativity and confidence in their ability to improvise" (Hinz, 1995, p. 31).

The method presented in this document proposes an instruction based on the following three components (which will be described in detail in following sections): Exploration, Language, and Application. Exploration is a time for students to "explore" improvisation out of the context of literature and without the pressure of performance. Language is a time for students

to listen to great recordings of real jazz artists, sing along with those recordings, transcribe great solos, and learn new scales, modes and harmonic progressions for use in jazz improvisation. Application is a time to apply learned knowledge to an ensemble performance setting, in the context of real jazz repertoire.

While this teaching strategy is specific in intent, it is not designed specifically for one type of ensemble. Improvisation can be taught to an individual, a small group (e.g., a jazz combo), a full big band, or even an entire concert band. The size of the ensemble can certainly present different challenges to the instructor, but the method of instruction need not change. That being said, it is recommended that students learn in a relatively small size group to ensure they receive enough individual assessment and feedback needed for successful growth. In other words, improvisation is ideally taught in a setting outside of daily band class (e.g., an extracurricular jazz ensemble or separate improvisation class). This claim is supported by Riviere (2006), stating that "the challenge ensemble directors face is breaking away from the traditional rehearsal model and creating a time slot in each lesson or rehearsal to step away from notated music to focus on auditory skills or concepts" (p. 40).

This method has been created through research and the author's personal educational experience. Additionally, it is not intended to be a comprehensive jazz curriculum. While improvisation is most often associated with jazz, it can be performed in other settings. There are other requirements for jazz playing, such as a particular articulation and style of performance. These aspects of the jazz language will be discussed briefly; however, the focus of this method is on the harmonic and melodic development of jazz improvisation skills.

Exploration

The term "exploration" has been used in conjunction with improvisation in a number of teaching methods (Volz, 2005, Riviere, 2006). In this particular method, exploration is simply one of three components in the teaching of improvisation. Exploration is removed from literature and performance; it is a time for students to express their musical creativity in a comfortable environment without performance pressure and use previously obtained skills and knowledge.

Riviere (2006) emphasizes "the importance of giving a child time to play with or manipulate an idea or skill to deepen and personalize his or her understanding of it" (p. 44). She also believes that "when it's time to address the more difficult aspects of the improvisation standard, such as improvising an actual melody in a particular style, the task is less frightening because the attitude of playful experimentation has already been shaped" (Riviere, 2006, p. 45). Azzara (1999) questions, "How many tunes, songs, and themes do students know by ear ("by heart") that they can sing and/or play on a musical instrument without notation?" (p.22). Simply playing without written notation is one component of improvisation that can be practiced as part of the exploration component. The research of Azzara (1993), Guilbalt (2004), and Laczo (1981) demonstrates that (as cited in Guilbault, 2009) "students' improvisations are the result of sequential skill learning and formal and informal music experiences during classroom activities" (p. 82). Exploration is just one part of the teaching sequence used in the learning of improvisation.

While research has shown that "exploration" is an important part of learning to improvise (Volz, 2005, Riviere, 2006), the term itself does not mean the same thing to everyone. Volz (2005) claims that in exploratory learning, "No rules can be broken, because there are no rules to break. No notes are wrong, and expressiveness is at the heart of the improvisation activity" (p.

50). Others believe that restrictions actually promote creativity (Azzara, 1999). While personal expression is the goal, it is difficult to judge success or failure when there are no limitations provided. Application is the goal, and in order for exploration to serve this goal, there must be limitations, just as there will be in the context of a particular tune in a performance setting.

Knowing that there will be limitations, how does the teacher determine what those limitations will be? An important part of the exploration component is that the students are not given new information. They are to work with familiar knowledge and skills and express their creativity within those confines. At the beginning of improvisation instruction, this may simply be the B-flat major scale. They could even be asked to use a single note and create a rhythmic improvisation. This type of instruction should be structured in a way that all students have a chance to be expressive. In addition, there is no opportunity for students to be judged on their playing. The classroom should simply become a workshop where students are playing around with different ideas.

One strategy used to make this exploration activity beneficial for everyone is to have students sing and play improvised ideas (Hinz, 1995). For example, one student will play a short musical idea, rest for an equal amount of time, and play the idea again, ensuring an accurate recall of the performed motive. Following the next rest, everyone else in the class or ensemble will sing the previously played idea. This process will be repeated a few times. When it is clear that everyone has a handle on the idea vocally, have the students try (one or a few at a time, possibly volunteers) to play the idea. This fosters not only creative expression on the part of one student, but aural development for the entire class. An extremely valuable resource for use in the exploration component is a book by Jamey Aebersold entitled, "Learn to Improvise Jazz: Major & Minor in Every Key" (Aebersold, 1976, 2009). This book contains many great exercises and

suggestions for learning to improvise, but most useful is the accompanying CD. It contains play-a-long tracks in all twelve major keys and twelve minor keys, providing a simple harmonic accompaniment using a single mode. Simply put the track on loop in the appropriate key and it provides a reference pitch for students to hear. Playing along with harmonic accompaniment reinforces the aural skills required to improvise. It will also assist in making "wrong" notes more clearly heard by the students.

The exploration component of teaching jazz improvisation is present strictly to foster creativity and minimize any anxiety students and teachers may have when approaching improvisation. Exploration is meant to encourage students and teachers to use the tools they have acquired in other practice sessions, lessons, or rehearsals to spontaneously compose melodies and explore their personal musical expression. Riviere summarizes that "an important key to any of these activities is to consider your students' and your own anxiety about improvisation. Many musicians and students fear improvisation for different reasons, but it is important to remove the element of fear and allow the musical mind to play. That is the essence of improvisation" (2006, p. 43).

Language

As discussed in the review of the literature, jazz improvisation is a language of its own (Berkowitz, 2010, Berliner, 1994, Velleman, 1978). The language encompasses a vocabulary that performers use to express their musical thoughts and ideas. While the process of developing a jazz vocabulary can be intimidating, it can be quite enjoyable and rewarding with the proper approach.

Language combines listening, singing, transcription, and theory to contribute to the development of improvisation skills. Although all three components (Exploration, Language and

Application) are important in the learning process, the largest amount of time should be spent on the development of the jazz language. It is also important to realize that while written transcriptions and theory are an essential part of the task at hand, new material in the language component should first be presented and practiced aurally before anything is written down. In other words, students should be able to play and sing new material from memory before using written notation. Watson (2010) studied achievement and self-efficacy in jazz improvisation based on aural vs. notated instruction. He found that while both methods were beneficial, the group taught aurally produced greater score increases between the beginning and end of study (Watson, 2010). Dr. Christopher Azzara supports this point as well by saying, "just as students can broaden their speaking vocabulary by listening to and learning language by ear, students can broaden their music vocabulary by listening to and learning music by ear" (1999, p. 22).

The first thing educators should do when approaching jazz education and teaching jazz improvisation is to have students listen to recordings. "To develop improvisational skill, don't rely on notation to remember music; rely on your ears" (Azzara, 1999, p. 23). This type of listening is not the same as playing the radio in the car, or listening to the mp3 player on a jog. Players must listen intently to recordings until they are able to sing them, matching the appropriate pitches and style used by the recorded artist. This may seem to be a daunting task, but the key is to use accessible recordings; solos that may not be extremely difficult in terms of technique, but still provide rich language. Miles Davis, arguably the most famous trumpeter in the history of jazz, is an appropriate place to start. Davis recorded countless jazz albums and played with some of the greatest jazz musicians of all time, such as John Coltrane and Bill Evans. It is not necessarily to immediately attempt to internalize an entire solo. Beginning with simply the head of the tune and one chorus of a solo is a sufficient start.

The figures section contains two original Miles Davis compositions and three partial transcriptions (one chorus each) of his solos: *Blues by Five*, head chart and solo (Appendix A, Appendix B), *Freddie Freeloader*, head chart and solo (Appendix G, Appendix H) and a solo on Sonny Rollins' *Doxy* (Appendix F). In addition, the head chart to Sonny Rollins' *Doxy* (Appendix E), Thelonius Monk's *Blue Monk*, head chart and J.J. Johnson solo (Appendix C, Appendix D) and Sonny Rollins' *Tenor Madness*, head chart and solo (Appendices I & J) are included. All of the previously mentioned tunes are considered to be jazz standards, played by amateur and professional performers alike. The transcribed (partial) solos are performed by great, historical jazz artists, but are also accessible for beginning improvisers. This is important to note because, while a student may be completely new to jazz improvisation, there need not be any compromise in the quality of repertoire used for instruction. Again, there is no better way to learn how to play jazz and improvise than by listening to and imitating great jazz artists.

Four of the five included tunes and transcriptions are in the form of the twelve-bar blues in the key of B-flat. The blues is a great place to start because it is a common jazz form, the harmony is easy to hear in its most basic presentation, and it contains only one type of chord, the dominant seventh. In terms of function, it contains the chords I7, IV7 and V7 (all dominant seventh), so it is a simple place to start, but again, both amateur and professional improvisers play the blues. The section entitled, "Sample Lesson" will include a detailed explanation of the blues harmony and dominant seventh chords in conjunction with an actual tune, Miles Davis' *Blues By Five.*

When listening to and attempting to internalize a tune, it is important to segment it into accessible parts. Much like the process of learning any new concept, the introduction of too much information at one time can lead to frustration and possible failure, rather than success.

This thought is supported by Wehr-Flowers (2006), who suggests that "modeling jazz style and musical language in small, repeatable phrases can build confidence and jazz vocabulary" (p. 346-347). The first few listens can focus on the head and becoming familiar with the melody. Then, focus on the bass line and listen to how the melody fits with the harmonic accompaniment. Once students have had a chance to hear (at least) the head a few times and get a feel for the harmonic motion, a discussion of form and harmony should take place. For example, if the tune is a blues, collectively discuss what students hear regarding harmony and form before presenting the actual harmonic progression. It is beneficial to assess and find out if students are hearing the harmonic motion; their ability to hear this will improve over time. The class can collectively discuss key center and harmony, discovering as much as they can from the recording before being presented with the answers. If ample time has passed for this sort of listening and discovery portion, the teacher can present the students with the harmony, aurally, of course, discussing the specific chords and their function within a key.

Since most of the included examples follow the twelve-bar blues harmony, the discussion of teaching harmony will be specific to the blues. While there are both simple and complex harmonic progressions that can be used in playing the blues, in the beginning, the most basic harmony should be used. In the key of b-flat, with one chord per measure, the blues is as follows:

B-flat7	B-flat7	B-flat7	B-flat7
E-flat7	E-flat7	B-flat7	B-flat7
F7	F7	B-flat7	B-flat7

Or, in terms of harmonic function:

I7	I7	I7	I7
IV7	IV7	I7	I7

V7 V7 I7 I7

Some charts may provide extra or alternative chords, but this simplified harmony can be used in any twelve-bar blues progression. Now that the harmony has been presented, it is important to understand how to define note choice. Hinz observes that "jazz musicians, like classical composers, use a melodic and harmonic vocabulary consisting of scales, arpeggios, and other patterns stylistically appropriate to their idiom" (1995, p. 30). Some limitations must be set in order to begin the development of vocabulary.

As the simplest blues progressions contains only dominant chords, students need only be introduced to the mixolydian mode at this point; they can then apply this knowledge to each of the three chords used (I7, IV7 and V7; B-flat7, E-flat 7 and F7). The easiest way to introduce a new mode is to relate it to the major scale as they are probably most familiar with it. The mixolydian mode is simply a major scale with a flat or lowered seventh. So, B-flat mixolydian contains the notes: B-flat, C, D, E-flat, F, G, A-flat, and B-flat – notice that the only difference between B-flat major and B-flat mixolydian is the seventh scale degree. Now, to build a dominant 7th chord, use only the first, third, fifth, and seventh scale degrees from the mixolydian mode. In this particular case, those notes would be B-flat, D, F, and A-flat.

Essential to an understanding of harmony is the knowledge of which notes are most important – those that define the harmony. The third and the seventh of each chord, or the third and seventh scale degree of each mode, are known as guide tones. Guide tones define the quality of the chord. For example, an open fifth (one and five) could be major or minor, as it lacks the third, but if a major third is added, then the listener knows that it is a major triad. Likewise, if a minor third were added, the listener then knows that it is a minor triad. This becomes increasingly important when considering note choices during improvisation and analyzing the

improvisations of others.

Looking back at the twelve bar blues progression, the same process (as described above) can be completed for both E-flat7 (IV7) and F7 (V7). Once students have an understanding of the harmonic implications of each chord, such as how to build the dominant seventh chord or how to create a mixolydian scale, then all of the tools are available for use in improvising over a B-flat blues progression. After discussing the harmony, by both key and function, the teacher may have the students play or sing the chord roots through the form, then arpeggiate the chords, and possibly play the appropriate mixolydian scale in each measure. Alterations of this exercise are certainly welcome, based on pacing and individual student need. Again, time spent on component (Exploration, Langauge, and Application) is flexible and will change between student groups. The important factor is that they are learning aurally and developing their ears.

After internalizing the head, the same can be done with one chorus of a transcribed solo. Throughout this process, whether realized or not, style and articulation (ideally) are engrained somewhat naturally. If this is not the case, the teacher can have students listen to the recording a few more times and specify specific style or articulation issues as a focal point. Also, this listening portion is not to be rushed. Students should have access to the same recordings so they can listen to them outside of class and continue the internalization process.

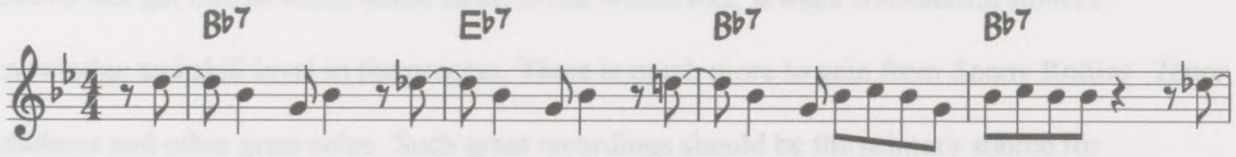
Once the head and/or solos become engrained, meaning that students can sing them with accurate pitch, rhythm and style, then it is time to begin playing. The transition from singing to playing may not be a quick one, so the teacher must be cautious with pace and segment the music into smaller parts as needed. It is perfectly acceptable if some students move quicker than others, because extra reinforcement is usually appropriate. Notice that there still has not been any mention of written notation. After students can both sing and play the given material accurately,

then the analysis can begin and some written notation can be introduced.

As mentioned previously, it is important to analyze the learned material to understand how melody and harmony work together in jazz improvisation. In addition to transcribed solos, the head of the tune is a great place to start, as it will generally outline the harmony quite intentionally. Sonny Rollins' solo on *Tenor Madness* (Appendix J), as well as the head (Appendix I), will be used for a brief example analysis.

Looking at the first few measures of the head of *Tenor Madness* (Figure 1.1 below; also Appendix I), the guide tones (thirds and sevenths) of the harmony are being outlined by the melody.

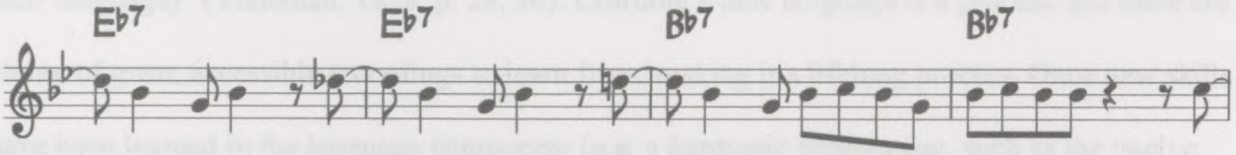
Figure 1.1



Measures 1-4 of Sonny Rollins' Tenor Madness

The head begins on D (the third of B-flat 7), moves to D-flat (the seventh of E-flat7), and then back to D again when the harmony goes back to B-flat7. Then, in the fifth bar (see Figure 1.2 below; also Appendix I), the melody stays on D-flat for two bars (as the harmony stays on E-flat7 for two bars), then moves back to D in bar seven.

Figure 1.2



Measures 5-8 of Sonny Rollins' Tenor Madness

Just this brief analysis alone provides a clear implication of harmony in Rollins' excellent solo material.

Sonny Rollins, in his solo on *Tenor Madness* (Appendix J), basically outlines the harmony in the same manner using different rhythmic ideas. He begins on D (just like the head), but instead of moving to D-flat in bar two (the seventh), he stays on D, which happens to be the third, the other guide tone in the chord, for the first four bars. Then, in bar five, he moves to D-flat. He outlines the harmony in a way not unlike the head of the tune, but varies his note choice slightly and changes the rhythm a bit. This is a simple way to create an improvisation, using the melody as a starting point for new ideas.

The example provided above is just the beginning in terms of analysis, but again, the teacher can get into as much detail as he or she would like, always considering student knowledge and skill level in the process. There is much more to gain from Sonny Rollins' *Tenor Madness* and other great solos. Such great recordings should be the primary source for developing the language of jazz improvisation.

The language component should include listening, singing, transcription, and theory. These aspects of improvisation combine to contribute to the proper development of jazz language. Most importantly, while some notation may be used, jazz improvisation is primarily an aural activity. In discussing an aural-imitative approach to improvisation, Velleman states that "this procedure approximates the way most good improvisers learn their skill (and the way native speakers learn their language)" (Velleman, 1978, p. 28, 30). Learning a new language is a process, but there are plenty of great, accessible recordings to learn from, making it a lifelong process. Once new skills have been learned in the language component (e.g. a harmonic progression, such as the twelve bar blues), they can they be practiced in the exploration component.

Application

The application component of this teaching method may perhaps be the most familiar educational setting. It involves taking learned (Language) and practiced (Exploration) knowledge and skills and applying them to a performance setting. Students will improvise in a real ensemble setting (in which the instrumentation may vary) and in the context of a real jazz tune. Jerry Coker (1964) states the following about a student approach to what he calls "the First Playing Session":

> Before assembling for the first playing session, each participant should prepare himself thoroughly by studying the material to be improvised. If every person will study the material carefully *before* each playing session, then his mind and fingers will not be entirely taken up with the details of knowing what notes are in each chord, what scale is used with each chord, and how the phrases should be fingered. The mind and fingers will be free to concentrate on more important aspects of playing, such as establishing melodic form; developing the meter sense, mood, and swing; finding useful notes and phrases; and planning and controlling the intensity of a solo in chosen or inspired moments (p. 26).

Not only does this reinforce the important aspect of personal practice, but it additionally supports the notion that the teaching of improvisation should be broken down into separate segments or components (such as Exploration, Language, and Application) in order to set students up for success. If time is taken for Exploration and Language, then learning repertoire (Application) and improvising in context will be much more enjoyable for teacher and student.

Depending on the amount of students in the jazz program, they may be learning in the context of a combo or a full big band (or possibly something in between). The only difference here is the approach to repertoire. Students in a jazz combo will likely be playing more jazz standards and perhaps memorizing entire tunes. A good resource for combo repertoire (jazz

standards) is *The Real Book*, which is published in several volumes. Students in a big band will be playing more band arrangements and using more notated music. An excellent resource for big band repertoire of varying skill level is *Teaching Music Through Performance In Jazz* (Carter, Marsalis, McCurdy, Modell & Thomas, 2008). Regardless, the approach to improvisation is the same in either venue, and if the work has been done in the Exploration and Language components, then Application is simply a matter of rehearsing music. The only difference is that improvisation is now a part of learning repertoire.

Summary

While Exploration, Language, and Application have been discussed in detail individually, it is essential to understand that all three components should be a regular part of the teaching of improvisation. More time may be spent on one component over another, but segmenting the process contributes to a higher level of student learning and reduces the amount of anxiety students may have in approaching jazz improvisation. In addition, approaching each component very intentionally and defining the learning process will eliminate the often found gray areas of learning jazz improvisation.

Sample Lesson: Teaching *Blues By Five,* a B-flat Blues

Introduction

It is beneficial to receive reinforcement when processing a new idea or approach to something. This sample lesson aims to provide a specific, concrete example of how to implement the Exploration, Language, and Application method when teaching jazz improvisation. The goal of the lesson will be to teach students to play the tune, *Blues by Five*, which is a twelve-bar, B-flat blues (see Appendix A) written by Miles Davis. Students will learn the harmonic progression, learn how to play the head of the tune, transcribe one chorus of Miles Davis' solo

and practice improvising over the blues progression. For this demonstration, it is assumed that this is all new material.

Step 1: Language – Learning the Harmony

The very first step in the learning process is to listen to Miles Davis' recording of *Blues By Five,* followed by a teacher-led discussion of what the students hear in terms of melody, harmony, form, et cetera. Allow the students time to think about what they are hearing and process what is going on in the recording, as it is the model for their own learning. After the discussion, introduce the form of the tune to the students. It begins with the head, which is played twice by the pianist. Next is the solo section, which contains solos in the following order: trumpet, saxophone, piano, bass, and trading between the piano and drums. Following the solos, the head is played twice by the pianist to end the tune. The teacher should allow the students to listen to the tune once more after being introduced to the form.

After becoming somewhat familiar with the tune through listening, students should begin learning the harmonic progression of the tune. In this case, *Blues By Five* is a twelve bar blues in the key of B-flat, so the harmony is as follows (chords shown by function and name – one chord per measure):

I7/B-flat7	I7/B-flat7	I7/B-flat7	I7/B-flat7
IV7/E-flat7	IV7/E-flat7	I7/B-flat7	I7/B-flat7
V7/F7	V7/F7	I7/B-flat7	I7/B-flat7

The teacher should instruct students on what to play over the twelve bar blues. In this case, we are dealing strictly with dominant seventh chords, so the students should first learn what a dominant seventh chord is and how to build it. A dominant seventh chord is a major triad with a flat or lowered seventh on top, so B-flat7 contains the notes B-flat, D, F, and A-flat (this process

is discussed in greater detail in the Language section of this chapter). After verbal instruction and musical demonstration (using the voice, a keyboard, or the instructor's primary instrument – simply arpeggiating up the chord) of a B-flat dominant seventh chord, students should be asked to then build a dominant seventh on both E-flat and F, the remaining two chords in the progression. This will ensure an understanding of the concept and test for transfer of knowledge. Once the students understand how to build and arpeggiate dominant seventh chords, it is time to have them play them, in time, through the progression. This can easily be done using a play-a-long CD (e.g. Aebersold's "Blues In All Keys"). First, simply have the students play whole note chord tones through the progrssion, re-articulating at the beginning of each measure and changing notes when the chord changes. Here is one example of what they can play each time through the form:

1st time: roots

2nd time: thirds

3rd time: fifths

4th time: sevenths

5th time: pick a chord tone (so the ensemble will no longer be playing in unison, but the harmony will still be intact, as all students should be playing a chord tone in each measure)

Next, have students arpeggiate the chord using quarter notes in each measure. For example, in the first measure, they will play: B-flat, D, F, and A-flat. Then, create a sequence, just as with the whole notes, for arpeggiation. Example:

1st time: arpeggiate up each chord, 1-3-5-7 (e.g., m. 1: B-flat, D, F, A-flat)

2nd time: arpeggiate down each chord, 7-5-3-1 (e.g., m. 5: D-flat, B-flat, G, E-flat)

3rd time: create a variation of the arpeggiation, 1-5-3-7 (e.g., m. 9: F, C, A, E-flat)

4th time: create an alternative variation

At this point, the students should be more familiar with the harmonic motion and comfortable playing the appropriate chord tones in each measure.

After learning to build dominant seventh chords and arpeggiate them throughout the blues progression, students should learn about the mixolydian mode and how to use the mixolydian scale. Mixolydian is simply a major scale with a flat or lowered seventh. So, in the case of B-flat, instead of playing an A-natural as the seventh scale degree, you would play an A-flat. The mixolydian mode works great for dominant seventh chords because it contains all of the chord tones. Students should be taught how to play the B-flat mixolydian scale and then asked to name the notes in the E-flat and F mixolydian scales, which are the other two chords in the blues progression. Once they can name and play the scales out of time, it is time to play them, in time, through the blues progression. Like the excercises used previously for the dominant seventh chords and arpeggiations, students can start by simply playing up the scale in each measure. For example, in measure 1, students will play: B-flat, C, D, E-flat, F, G, A-flat, B-flat in eighth notes, so when they reach the tonic at the top it will be time to start the next measure. The teacher can create variations in the exercises, but here is one example to follow first:

1st time: scale up on each chord (e.g., m. 1: B-flat, C, D, E-flat, F, G, A-flat, B-flat)

2nd time: scale down on each chord (e.g., m. 5: E-flat, D-flat, C, B-flat, A-flat, G, F, E-flat)

3rd time: scale up on m. 1, scale down on m. 2, scale up on m. 3, et cetera

4th time: create an alternative variation

These exercises can be repeated and altered as needed; the goal is to have the students become extremely comfortable with playing the appropriate chords and scales over each measure, so comfortable that it eventually becomes a subconscious activity. Once they can play through the

blues progression, arpeggiating chords and playing scales in a variety of exercises, then step one is complete.

Step 2: Exploration – Improvisation Using Dominant Seventh Chords and the Mixolydian Scale

Following the first Language component, students need time to further engrain what they learned involving the harmonic progression of *Blues By Five.* In addition to playing exercises over the harmony, it is important to have them be creative and improvise using those learned techniques. As discussed in the Exploration section of this chapter, students will practice improvising and develop aural skills by singing and playing ideas back and forth using a harmonic accompaniment, such as an Aebersold CD. In this case, they will be using the dominant seventh chord and the mixolydian scale exclusively to create ideas over the blues progression. Everyone should participate and improvise, both playing and singing ideas within the set limitations: using the dominant seventh chord and mixolydian scale.

Step 3: Language – Learning the Head

After learning the harmonic progression of *Blues By Five,* students should have an easier time learning the head aurally, as it is derived from the chord tones. This Language segment should begin just as the first one did, with listening. Have the students listen (again) to the recording of Miles Davis' *Blues By Five,* listening specifically for harmonic implications in the melody (how the melody works with and is derived from the harmony). Have them listen a few times (to just the head – there is no need to play the entire tune each time), singing along with the melody. Then, have them listen a few more times and play along softly (barely playing, so everyone can still hear), attempting to learn the head by ear. It is likely that not everyone will be able to play the head flawlessly after listening just a few times, but if this exercise is done frequently (in the future, with other tunes), then the process will become easier.

The teacher can assist students in learning by singing, modeling, or even directing students toward the correct notes, but the activity should remain one that is entirely aural. This forces students to listen closely and begin to process melody and harmony at a higher level, because they cannot simply look at the notes and play them. It can be beneficial to break down the melody into smaller segments, such as four measures at a time. They can learn each four measure segment, and then put it back into context and play the entire head. In addition to learning the correct notes and rhythms, pay close attention to the style and inflection used in the recording and have the students attempt to match these aspects of playing as well. This will help when it comes time for transcription as well. Once the students can play the head aurally, along with the recording, matching notes, rhythms and style, then step three is complete.

Step 4: Exploration – Improvisation Using Dominant Seventh Chords, the Mixolydian Scale, and the Head

Much like step two, this Exploration segment allows students to be creative and practice improvising. In addition to using dominant seventh chords and the mixolydian scale (as in step two), they will also be instructed to think about the head of the tune and allow it to influence their improvisations. Students can take rhythmic ideas from the head and alter them melodically (playing the same idea on a different pitch) or take melodic ideas and alter them rhythmically (playing the same notes but with different rhythm), but adding another layer is essential. At this point they are responsible for chords, scales, and the head, which at this point are previously learned knowledge and skills used in the Exploration of improvisation.

Step 5: Language – Transcribing Miles Davis' solo on Blues By Five

Once the harmonic progression and head have been learned, students should begin transcribing Miles Davis' solo on *Blues By Five*. Transcription can be intimidating at first; it

requires patience on the part of the student and teacher. Appendix B contains the first chorus of Miles Davis' solo on *Blues By Five*. It is suggested that the teacher first transcribe the chorus (prior to teaching this step) aurally before using the attached notation. The teacher cannot expect to teach students how to transcribe a solo without having done it first themselves. The process of transcription is not dissimilar from the process used in step three to learn the head.

The teacher will play the recording of the solo a few times, having students sing along until they can sing the entire chorus from memory. Then they will listen a few times and attempt to play ideas on their instruments. Segmenting it into four measure increments helps, and again, the teacher can assist with notes and rhythms, but without notation involved. The aural component is most important in this step, as well as step three, and it will become easier as the activity becomes a routine part of the learning process. Students will begin listening to music in a different way, paying closer attention to harmony and developing a skill for playing by ear.

The transcription process may take some time, even for just one chorus. It is a good idea to make recordings accessible for students, so they can take them home, put on headphones and work individually. If a student excels, have them transcribe a second chorus. If a student struggles, give them all the time they need and help them. It is extremely important they they not feel intimidated, but instead comfortable with the learning process, however long it may take. Again, they will get better and will develop a higher skill level for transcription and playing by ear. Once the students can play at least one chorus of Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue,* then step five is complete.

Step 6: Exploration – Improvisation Using Dominant Seventh Chords, the Mixolydian Scale, the Head, and ideas from Miles Davis' solo on Blues By Five

Step six simply takes the ideas applied in steps two and four and adds another layer on top.

In addition to using dominant seventh chords, the mixolydian scale and the head to create spontaneous composition, students will take influence from Miles Davis' solo when exploring improvisation.

Step 7: Application – Creating an Arrangement

After learning the harmonic progression, the head, a Miles Davis transcription, and many approaches to improvising (chords, scales, the head, transcription), students will be ready to put the tune together in an ensemble setting. This tune can be played by a seventeen-piece big band or a duo, in other words, ensemble size and instrumentation need not be a factor. Either way, the enjoyment is in creating the ensemble's own arrangement of the tune and improvising with each other in real time. To create a basic arrangement:

1. Determine who (what instrument or instruments) will play the head and how many times it will be played.
2. Determine a solo order (who will solo first – after the head – who will solo second, et cetera).
3. Determine who will play the head at the end and how many times it will be played.
    a. Will it be the same as the beginning?
    b. Will there be harmony added?

The arrangement does not have to be set in stone. Just because the solo order is one way on Monday, does not mean it has to be the same on Wednesday. Ultimately it is up to the director, but leaving some spontanaeity and the element of surprise in the rehearsal process fosters excitement in the students. Creating an arrangement of a tune adds a personal touch to the performance and is what makes jazz such a unique art form.

Conclusion

The sample lesson for teaching Miles Davis' *Blues By Five* provides step by step instructions for teaching students the components required for understanding and execution of jazz improvisation. If a teacher has never taught jazz improvisation previously, then this is a great way to begin. After using this lesson as a starting point, it is recommended that teachers begin using the three components (Exploration, Language and Application) in a manner that best suits their particular classroom needs. The content and method of instruction will not change, but depending on class size and ability level, the amount of time spent on one component or another will likely change. Other factors may also influence the time spent or how often a particuar component is used, such as the difficulty level of the tune or transcription. Regardless, all three components are beneficial and essential in learning to improvise and should be implemented into the teaching of jazz improvisation on a regular basis.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Further Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide preservice and inservice teachers with a basic approach to teaching beginning jazz improvisation in the classroom. It was determined that, due to the lack of emphasis on jazz education – specifically jazz improvisation – in instruction at both the public school and university level, as well as the inclusion of improvisation as both a national and Georgia state "Standard for Music Performance," there exists a need for an accessible method for teaching beginning jazz improvisation to instrumentalists. The need for further resources also exists because many teachers lack the experience and instruction required to successfully teach jazz improvisation.

Conclusions

The teaching method presented in this study was created based on personal research, existing teaching methods and strategies, and the educational experience of the author. A number of valuable resources are used in this teaching process, but are presented strategically within this document in order to avoid overwhelming the reader. This method suggests that teaching improvisation is most effective when approached using three different components: Exploration, Language, and Theory. Exploration involves aural development through singing and playing improvised melodies, singing and playing back melodies created by other students, and playing improvised solos with an accompaniment (live or play-a-long) using previously learned knowledge and skills. In the Language component, students will listen to recordings of artist-level jazz musicians, transcribe solos, and develop knowledge of jazz theory by learning the chords, scales and modes used in various harmonic progressions. The Application component

involves applying the developed improvisation skills to jazz repertoire, where students learn to improvise in an actual performance setting, in the context of real music. These three components are used to reduce anxiety and teach improvisation in a comfortable and accessible setting, segmenting the process to allow time for students to process and absorb the given information and develop the skills needed to improvise.

Implications

Jazz improvisation is an essential part of a student's music education, both at the public school (elementary, middle, and high school) level as well as the university level. Research shows that the study of improvisation contributes to better overall musicianship (Azzara, 1993, Azzara, 1999, Guilbault, 2009, Riviere, 2006). In addition, the inclusion of improvisation as both a national and Georgia state "Standard for Music Performance" further implies its value (Cox, 2009, "Performance Standards," 2011).

It is important that the teaching of improvisation be intentional and conducted strategically, especially in the beginning. There are countless resources and materials available for instruction in jazz improvisation, but some can be overwhelming to a newcomer. The act of improvisation can be quite demanding on the performer, so setting an appropriate pace and dividing the instruction into accessible segments is imperative.

Students and teachers alike should continue their study of improvisation far beyond the exercises, strategies, songs and artist transcriptions mentioned in this particular study. Most importantly, the listening process should never cease. Those interested in furthering their jazz education and increasing their improvisation skills should be continuously listening to recordings, mimicking the language and style used by established jazz artists. Begin with the included transcriptions and continue past the initial chorus given. For further listening beyond

the tunes discussed in this study, see Appendix N.

In addition to personal listening and transcription, it is a good idea for teachers and students to become involved in the playing of live music. Whether it is a student, community or professional ensemble, improvising in a real performance setting with live musicians is essential to the development of greater musicianship.

Recommendations for Further Study

The following studies could be conducted to further contribute to the research and teaching strategies presented in this study:

1. A case study, documenting the employment and results of this specific method in any of the following classroom settings:
    a. Elementary school
    b. Middle School
    c. High School
    d. College Undergraduate Studies
2. A causal-comparative study comparing the effectiveness of this method as compared to another.
3. A teacher survey, following the employment of the teaching strategies discussed specifically in this study, could be conducted to assess the outcomes of this teaching method used in a variety of settings.
4. An intermediate or advanced method could be created, based on the same principles and strategies used in this beginning method.

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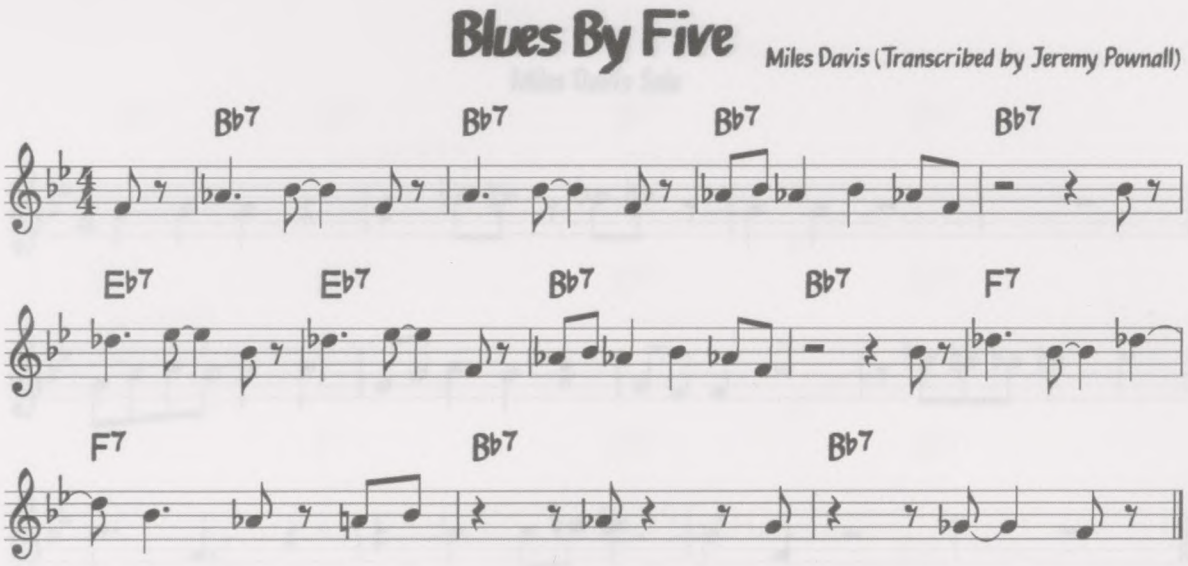
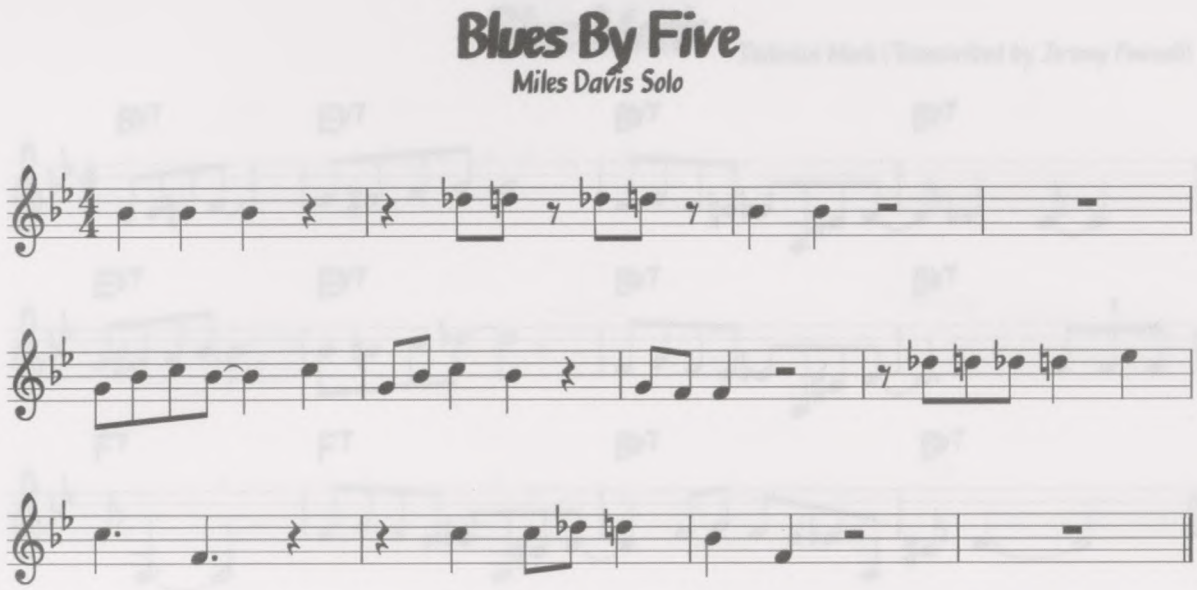
APPENDIX A



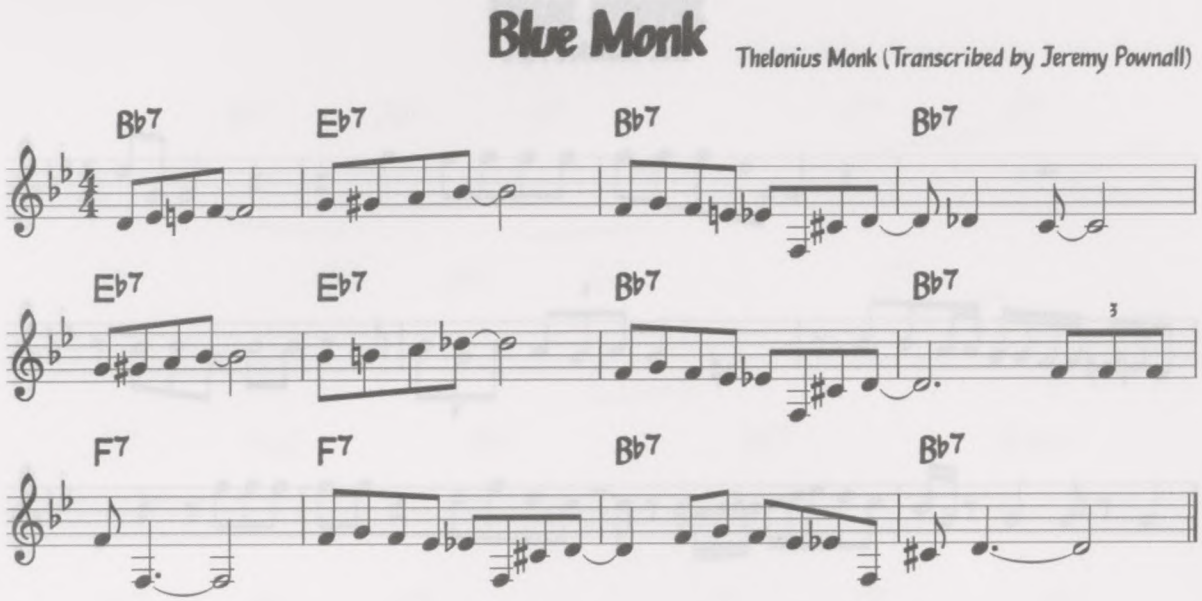
"Blues by Five" head, transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Miles Davis on the record, *Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet (1957)*

APPENDIX B



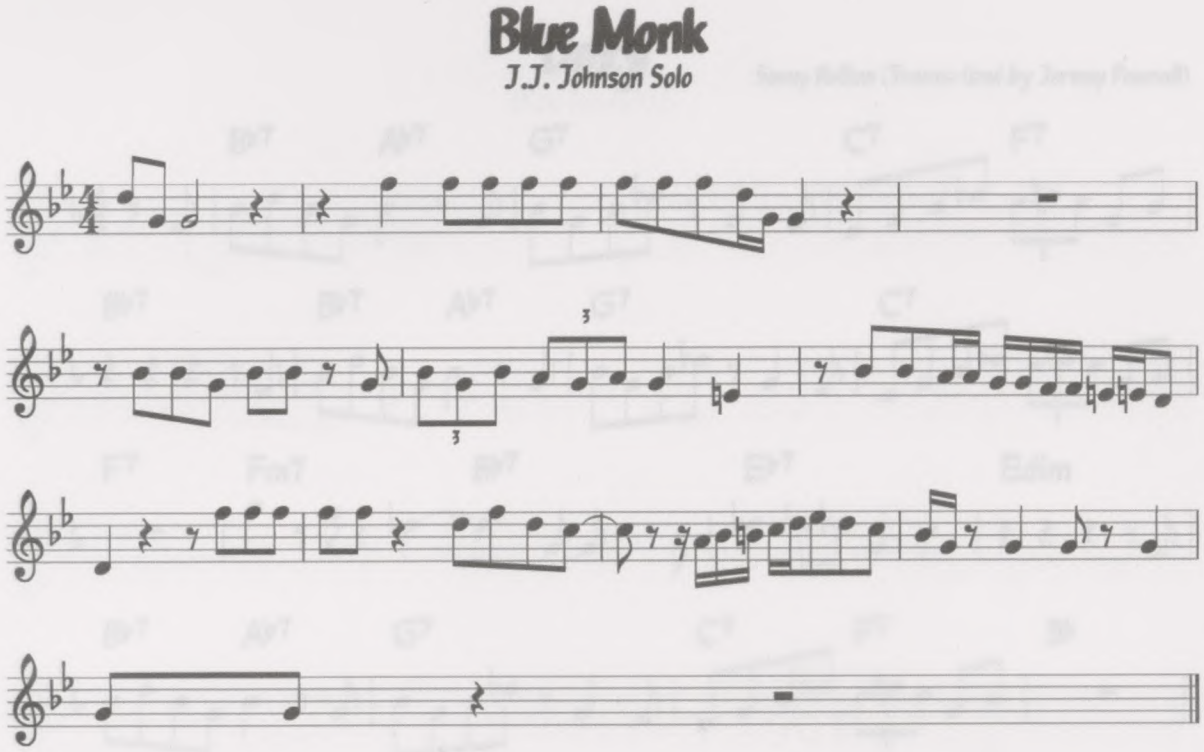
"Blues by Five" solo (first chorus), transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Miles Davis on the record, *Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet (1957)*

APPENDIX C



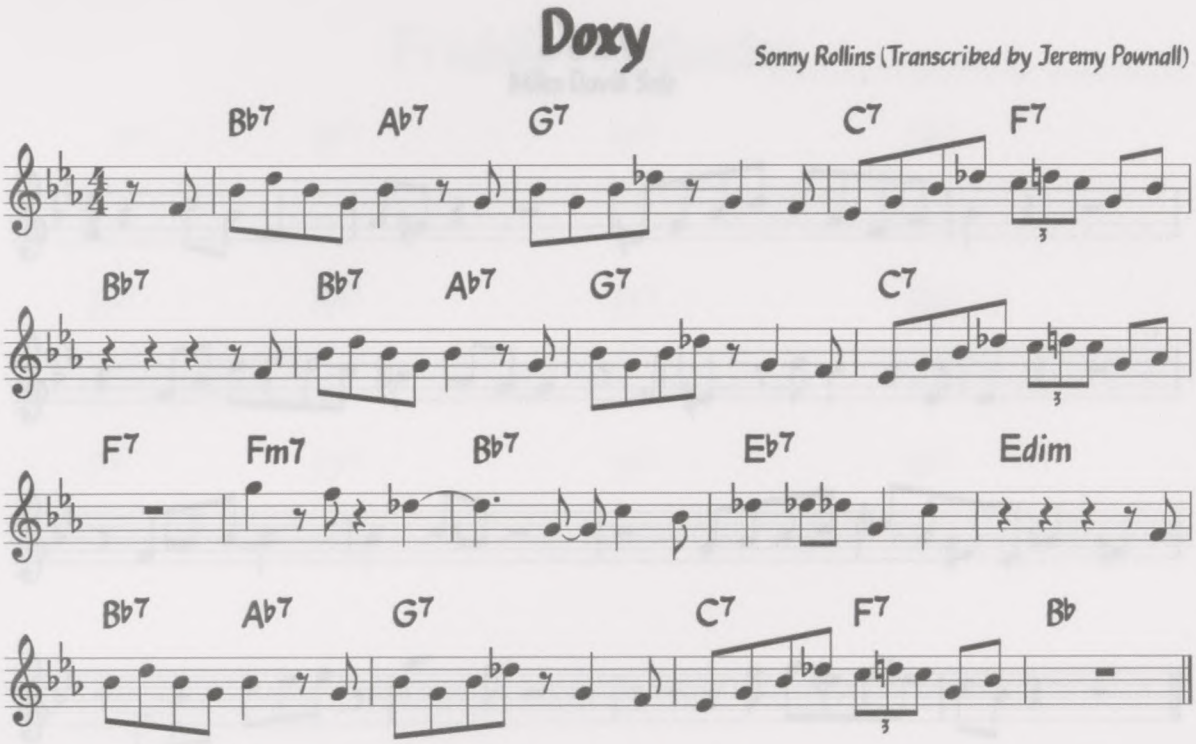
"Blue Monk" head, transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, asperformed by J.J. Johnson on the record, *The Great Kai & J.J. (1960)*

APPENDIX D



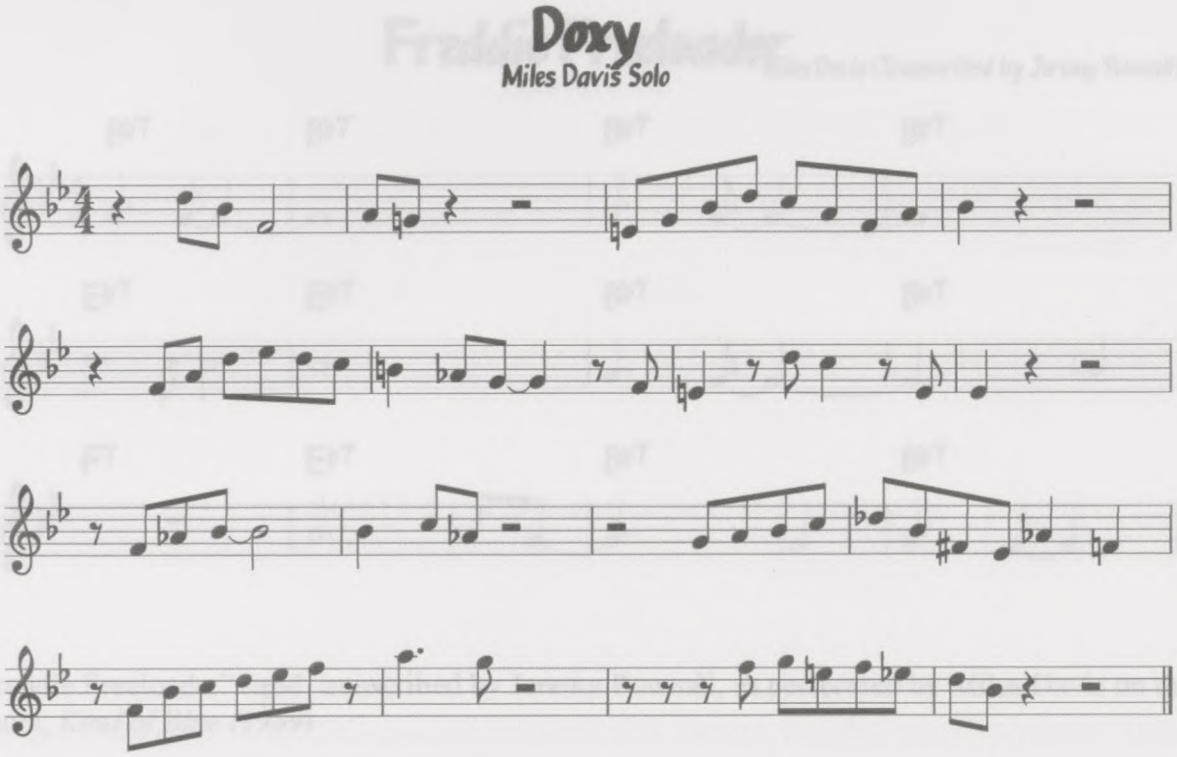
"Blue Monk" solo (first chorus), transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by J.J. Johnson on the record, *The Great Kai & J.J. (1960)*

APPENDIX E



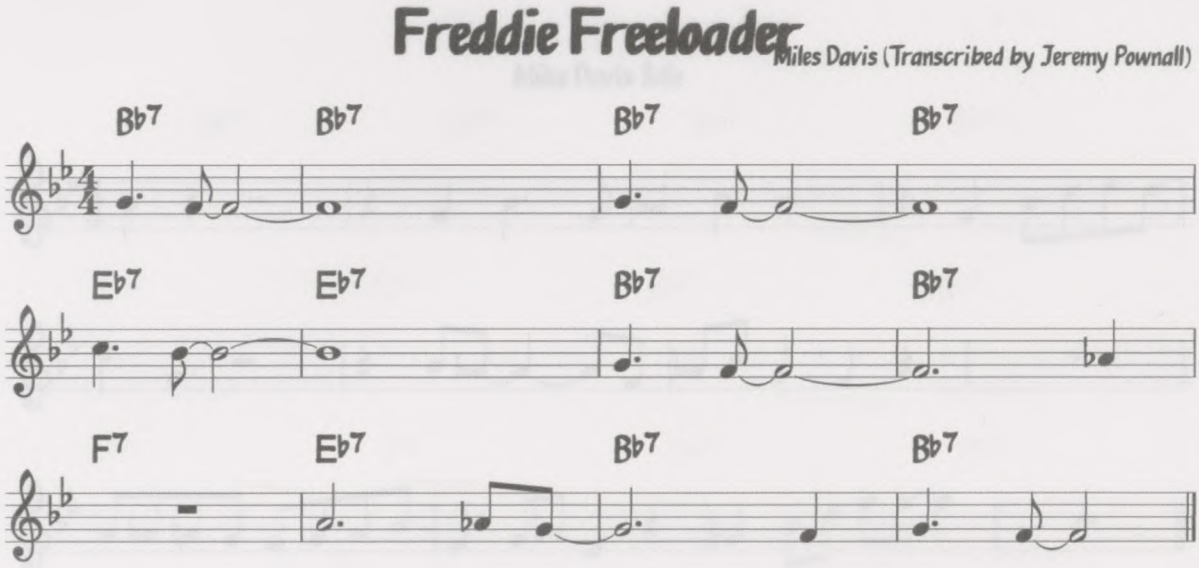
"Doxy" head, transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Miles Davis on the record, *Bags Groove (1957)*

APPENDIX F



"Doxy" solo (first chorus), transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Miles Davis on the record, *Bags Groove (1957)*

APPENDIX G

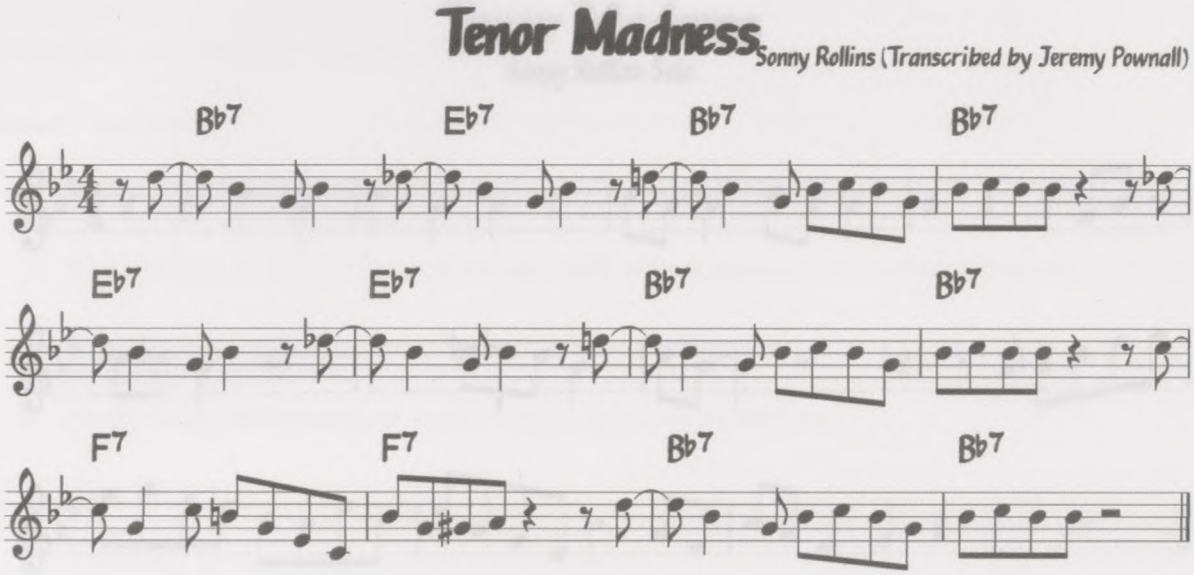


"Freddie Freeloader" head, transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Miles Davis on the album, *Kind of Blue (1959)*

APPENDIX H

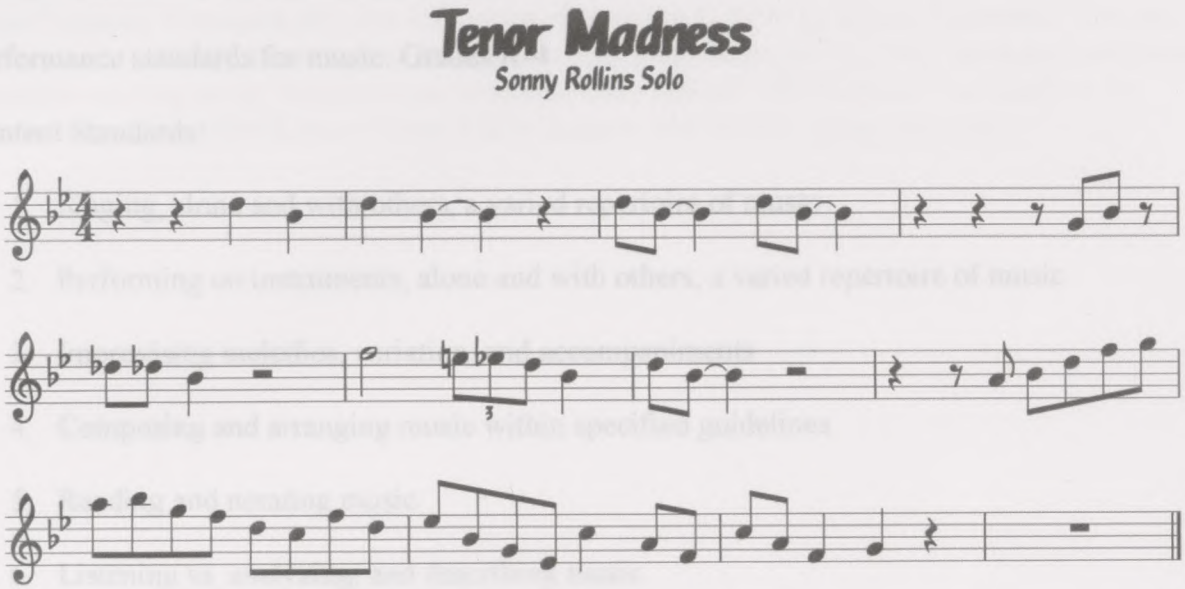
"Freddie Freeloader" solo (first chorus), transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Miles Davis on the record, *Blues by Five (1959)*

APPENDIX I



"Tenor Madness" head, transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Sonny Rollins on the album, *Tenor Madness (1956)*

APPENDIX J



"Tenor Madness" solo (first chorus), transcribed by Jeremy Pownall, as performed by Sonny Rollins on the album, *Tenor Madness (1956)*

APPENDIX K

National Association for Music Education

Performance standards for music: Grades K-4

Content Standards:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
3. Improvising melodies, variation, and accompaniments
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines
5. Reading and notating music
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
7. Evaluating music and music performances
8. Students identify similarities and differences in the meanings of common terms used in the various arts
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Performance Standards for music: Grades 5-12

Content Standards:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines
5. Reading and notating music
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
7. Evaluating music and music performances
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

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APPENDIX L

Georgia Performance Standards for Music Education

Band

Elementary School (Grades 4-5) Beginning Band; Middle School (Grades 6-8) Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Band; High School (Grades 9-12) Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Mastery Band

A. Skills and Techniques/Performance

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, through a varied repertoire of music

3. Reading and notating music

B. Creation

4. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments

5. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines

C. Critical Analysis/Investigate

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

7. Evaluating music and music performances

D. Cultural and Historical Context

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Please note that the above list contains only the core standards, which do not change between grade levels. The specific goals, which do correspond with each grade and skill level, are not presented.

The current Georgia Performance Standards were published on June 18, 2009. The above list of Band standards was taken from pages 12-31.

The complete listing of the Georgia Department of Education Fine Arts Education Georgia Performance Standards for Music can be found at http://gmea.org/.

APPENDIX M

Recommended Listening: Albums

Alley Cats – Gene Harris (1998)
Ballads – John Coltrane (1963)
Bird and Diz – Charlie Parker & Dizzy Gillespie (1952)
Birth of the Cool – Miles Davis (1957)
Blue Train – John Coltrane (1957)

Cannonball & Coltrane – Cannonball Adderley & John Coltrane (1964)

Charlie Parker with Strings – Charlie Parker (1950)

Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet – Miles Davis (1958)

Giant Steps – John Coltrane (1960)

Kind of Blue – Miles Davis (1959)

My Funny Valentine – Chet Baker (1980)

Relaxin' with the Miles Davis Quintet – Miles Davis (1958)

Saxophone Colossus – Sonny Rollins (1956)

Somethin' Else – Cannonball Adderley (1958)

Standards: Live at the Village Vanguard – J.J. Johnson (1988)

Sonny Side Up – Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins & Sonny Stitt (1958)

Sonny Stitt – Sonny Stitt (1956)

Stan Getz & Bill Evans – Stan Getz & Bill Evans (1973)

Steamin' with the Miles Davis Quintet – Miles Davis (1961)

Study in Brown – Clifford Brown & Max Roach Quintet (1955)

Sunday at the Village Vanguard – Bill Evans (1961)

Tenor Madness – Sonny Rollins (1956)

The Gene Harris Trio Plus One – Gene Harris (1985)

Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane at Carnegie Hall – John Coltrane & The Thelonius Monk Quartet (Recorded 1957, Released 2005)

Time Out – Dave Brubeck Quartet (1959)

Waltz for Debby - Bill Evans (1961)

Workin' with the Miles Davis Quintet – Miles Davis (1959)